Frustration with treatment regimens, feelings of shame, and worries about relationships negatively affect quality of life for men and women with genital warts, a new study finds.

Danish researchers Gitte Lee Mortensen and Helle K Larsen, MD, used focus groups to explore the impact of genital warts on a small group of young people recruited from an STD clinic. Subjects, who were divided by gender into groups (n=5 in each group) were between the ages of 18-30 and had genital warts for at least three months (average length of symptoms was 11 months). Participants were asked questions that assessed how having warts impacted their lives regarding symptoms, treatment, and social, romantic, and sexual relationships and activities.

Common themes that emerged include:

- Subjects experienced a high degree of stigma and shame over their diagnosis, and “...[F]eelings of being impure and repulsive.”
- A number of participants expressed concern about whether or not having warts pointed to infidelity in a relationship.
- Most were “pessimistic” that several rounds of treatment may be necessary to resolve lesions. Many viewed their treatment as “inconsistent and experimental.”

- While some worried about possible health outcomes (e.g., confusion over whether or not warts can lead to cancer), the majority viewed genital warts as mainly having a sexual and emotional impact. Subjects reported lower sexual initiative and a loss of “pleasure and spontaneity” in their love lives.

The authors conclude that genital warts affect patients “psychologically, socially and sexually” and all participants in their study “expressed a significant reduction in their quality of life as a result of having [warts].” They add that when considering the value of HPV vaccination programs, the psychosocial impact of genital warts should be considered.

Reference: